DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 167 141 IR 006 899

TITLE	Guided Enrichment of Institutionalized Deliquents through Interest-Based Library Materials. George Junior Republic, Grove City, Pennsylvania.
INSTITUTION	Pennsylvania State Library, Harrisburg.
PUB DATE	Jun 77
NOTE	17p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Delinquents; *Enrichment; Evaluation; *Institutionalized Persons; *Library Materials; Males; *Outreach Programs; Projects
IDENTIFIERS	Library Services and Construction Act

ABSTRACT

The project described was undertaken at a private residential juvenile treatment center for boys 10 to 18 years old to present programs that would motivate reading and stimulate interest in human interrelationships. Staff sensitivity sessions, selection of current interest paperback books and magazines, and construction of storage units within each of the eight cottages were followed by activities that included group discussions on topics of interest led by library staff in individual cottages, presentation of a discussion on legal rights for all residents, a daytime lecture series during the summer months, and the setting up of a central room for the display and use of current interest library materials. Program evaluation indicated that reading scores improved for participants in the program and that staff members heartily accepted the program, as did the institution's residents. (MBF)

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Guided Enrichment of Institutionalized Deliquents through Interest-Based Library Materials

George Junior Republic
Grove City, Pennsylvania

LSCA Title I Project July 1975 - June 1977

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

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I. INTRODUCTION

George Junior Republic is a private residential juvenile treatment center housing boys from 10 to 18. Presently, the educational complex includes 184 students, 25% of which represent minority groups, in grades 4-12. The school breakdown consists of three units: a Special Education Unit, a Junior High Unit, and a Senior High Unit.

The over-all campus is divided into eight cottages, each housing from eight to forty boys; an Intensive Security Unit housing as many as fifteen boys; and a hospital unit with four permanent residents and a varying number of patients.

Most students are assigned to the institution by the juvenile courts authority. In most cases, social maladjustment is evident since these youngsters have had some difficulty with the law, family relationships, and school adjustments. Many display emotional disturbances and learning disabilities.

It was my observation after some fifteen years of working with the youngsters at Goerge Junior Republic, as a teacher, coach, and cottage uncle, that these boys were coming to us with tremendous inadequacies in reading, human interrelationships, sense of values, knowledge of rights and responsibilities under the law, consumer rights and responsibilities, and the knowledge of economics and the work ethic. Most came with damaged self-concepts. All came with a general distrust of adults and authority, especially when related to education. The only people these youngsters trusted was their peer group. Their only "factual" information was attained through hearsay.

II. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Prior to the implementation of our current program, the only library services on campus were conducted through the school library. This facility contains some 10,000 volumes which are strongly academic oriented. Most of the books in this collection are of the hardback variety with a general disconcern for current best sellers and individual interests. Few,if any audio-visual materials were available on a "hands-on-basis". While the library itself was well staffed and well managed, there were inadequacies. Few up-to-date paperbacks were available, facilities were open during school hours, and ineffective locator skills caused youngsters to be overwhelmed by "so many books", and thus shy away from using the library and its services.

It was our thinking then that if Mohammed would not come to the mountain, we would take the mountain to Mohammed. A project was then developed and submitted to the Bureau of Library Development under the Library Services and Construction Act, Title I.

The project approval permitted us to hire library guidance specialists for the residential cottages to present programs that would motivate reading and stimulate an interest in the areas of inadequacy that were previously mentioned. A reading specialist was hired to coordinate the overall program and match levels of reading with interest and individual needs. A library certified program director was hired to implement the project.

Thus with a staff committed to a program featuring interest-based activities, a postivie reinforcement approach, an informal and congenial atmosphere, and easy accessibility to materials, the project entitled, Guided Enrichment of Institutionalized Delinquents through Interest-Based Library Materials, was begun.

III. DEVELOPMENT AND DESCRIPTION

The first phase of our project involved staff sensitivity training sessions. Student profiles, institutional needs, and program goals were just some of the topics thoroughly discussed.

One of the most important activities during these early sessions was to take each staff member to her prospective cottages for orientation meetings with both cottage parents and students. During these meetings, a strong effort was made to establish a relationship which would be cooperative and have benefits for all involved.

Cottage parents were made to feel that we were in their cottages to provide library services only. We did not wish to interfere with their normal operation. We solicited their ideas and compiled with their wishes concerning where and when we would operate.

Students were contacted for input in regard to topic they wished to discuss as well as the kinds of books and magazines they would read should they become available. Students were given book lists and magazine lists and actually had an opportunity to participate in selection of materials and books that they would be using.

The response was tremendous. Very few books were selected that would not be considered worthy reading material.

Along with reading and audio-visual materials, it was necessary to provide storage facilities. Each cottage was equipped with a shelving unit to attractively display books and magazines. Storage carts were provided to have a secure place for keeping unsupervised materials.

Until our ordered equipment, books, and magazines arrived, the staff was in need of materials to use in the cottages. A donation of approximately 700 books was given to us by the Department of Education. Upon receiving these, books were quickly distributed to the cottages as a starter collection. Also, a plea was put out to the public asking for donations of unwanted books or periodicals. From this request, we received in the area of 100 additional titles for our collection.

There was a great effort on the part of library guidance personnel to establish a congenial rapport through special projects designed to stimulate interest, motivate reading, and establish a feeling of trust between student and librarian. One staff member chose the occult and the supernatural as her first topic of discussion. Because of the tremendous interest in this subject, this proved to be an excellent "ice-breaking"activity. Along with filmstrips on these subjects, outsides reference materials were brought in, supplemental reading was provided, and a guest speaker from Slippery Rock State College was invited to come and lecture to any boys especially interested in these areas.

In an attempt to teach a lesson on following directions, working with peers, and respecting authority, a "pizza party" and a "cookie party" were held in one cottage. Here, the staff member provided the group of boys with a basic recipe and instructions and the boys prepared and cooked the food. The youngsters also took care of all preparations necessary to serve the rest of the cottage and the cleaning up afterwards.

Since the interests of another staff member included cross-country skiing, this was an area of instruction given to two cottages. Actual ski equipment was brought in for the boys to try out one sunny afternoon. Since few of the boys had ever been on skis before, they enjoyed this opportunity to try out their skills. A second project initiated by this staff member was yoga classes. Instructor and boys could all be seen without shoes and on the floor in various yoga positions. This led to many requests for books on this subject as more information was sought in this area.

Another staff member, who had a good deal of experience in drama, oraganized a Radio Drama Club and a Debate Team. The latter was not as successful as anticipated due to the lack of adequate research material in the school library on the topics in which the boys were interested. However, it did provide an excellent opportunity for the staff to conduct "mini-lessons" on the use of the library and using reference materials. On the other hand, the Radio Drama Club was quite successful. Several plays were recorded and broadcast over the campus radio station. In addition to giving the boys a chance to build confidence in their individual abilities and skills, these activities also helped to improve reading skills.

An extensive unit on legal rights, geared particularly to citizens under 21, was presented in all of the cottages. Using filmstrips and various books as source materials, the library personnel had no trouble in conducting lively discussions among the boys in such areas as rights of privacy and freedom, conflicting rights, trials, crime, students' rights, drinking, employment,and legal agreements.

Another program that was relevant to the students was that on careers. Through audio-visual materials and books, students could obtain up- to-date information on virtually any career in which they were interested. Instructors helped the students to examine their own interests, abilities, and skills, and to then set realistic goals for themselves. In addition, students were taught such practical information as how to write a resumé, fill out a job application, act on an interview, and locate potential job openings;requirements for specific jobs; and what would be expected of them once they were hired. The Senior High boys,especially,found these activities to be worthwhile.

Consumer education, an area about which the boys had little knowledge, was also offered as a topic for discussion. Through audio-visual and supplemental reading materials, the boys were taught about contracts, credit, buying a car or home, and wise money management. Along with this, sample forms were used to show students how to apply for a loan, credit, checking or savings account, and a social security card, and how to write out a check or deposit slip. Knowledge of these kinds of practical skills are essential for the boys' success of the outside world.

Those activities previously mentioned are only a few of those which have been offered to the boys as a series of activities designed to promote discussion, widen the boys' sphere if knowledge, and to encourage follow-up reading for additional information. Other areas developed include personality, roles and goals, moods, values, self-confidence, teen problems, drug education, dating and marriage, black studies, and others that were strickly for enjoyment.

To conduct these activities, staff members visited the cottages four times a week. Each instructor was assigned two cottages and visited each for a period of one hour per night. The average nightly attendence varied, but from records kept it was found that between 5 and 15 boys attended the sessions, depending on the subject matter presented. Along with the nightly programs, the instructor brought sets of books (usually 20 per set) into the cottage for students to browse through and from which to make selections. At first, these sets were left in the cottage for a period of 2 to 3 weeks, with reviews for each book typed up and displayed nearby. Boys employed the "honor system" in signing out and replacing books. This system proved to be unsatisfactory, and as a result it was modified so that the book set was removed at the end of the cottage visit and returned the next night. This meant that the boys now had to sign out their books with the library staff member. This new system seemed to evolve a new respect and value for the book's return and it physical condition. (The initial core collections as well as all magazines remained in the cottages on a continual basis to be read by the boys at their leisure.)

During the summer months of 1976, another change was made in our overall program. Library personnel continued to visit the cottages nightly bringing books, magazines, and programs to the boys, but a daytime "lecture series" was initiated. This change was made due to the fact that most of the students were out of school and unoccupied during the day. We saw here an excellent opportunity to give interested boys something constructive to do with their free time. And so, each day four sessions were held and students attended on a volunteer basis. Small-group discussions on such topics as careers, legal rights, personality, values, dating, divorce, drugs, alcohol, and self-confidence were held following a filmstrip presentation. Audio-visual materials were used along with hand-outs and role playing to put across certain concepts. After the "lecture" was over students were given time to choose related books, read magazines, or view materials on their own. Learning stations were set up around the room for the boys convenience.

In September, with the start of school, another change was initiated. Because of a loss of a few staff members due to job changes, we had limited personnel. An empty room adjacent to the school library was given to us for our use during the school day. Here, all of our materials were stored and books were attractively displayed. Learning stations were set up around the room and could be used by any student who had a study hall in the library. In this room, any of our A-V materials could be used, or studying could be done. The average number of boys per day

initially was around twelve, but as the winter months progressed, the number rose to 19-22 per day. It was also found that the number of books being signed out of this room averaged between ten and fifteen per day.

During the evening hours (from 6:00 to 9:00) and on weekends (Saturday/Sunday, 1:00 to 4:00) the school library, along with this reading room, was made available for use by the boys. During these times, the boys were permitted to use any of our A-V materials, books, and equipment, or to use the school library's facilities.

A second staff member continued to visit each of the eight cottages, the hospital, and ISU during the evening. Book sets were made available, magazines were distributed, and special requests for books were filled. However, because of the heavy work load, she was unable to continue with the subject presentation part of the program in the cottages.

With our program operating during the day, evenings, and on weekends, the boys were given ample opportunity to utilize library facilities. A student could voluntarily come to the library at any of these times to participate in an activity of his choice. Yet, books and magazines were still regularly taken into the cottages for those boys who were unable to, or perferred not to, come to us. This flexibility of working hours and ability to modify our programs for GJR students was one of the special features of our project. When dealing with institutions, this is essential. In addition to helping better meet the needs of the residents, it is also encourages the co-operation and acceptance of the institutional staff.

In conclusion, we have attempted to outline above a description of the operation of our program over the past two years. Included were a discussion of some of the major units developed, the modifications made on the original program and why, and a few of its outstanding features.

Our idea was a rather ambitious one. We hoped to supply these youngsters with an adult with whom they could relate and rely upon. In addition to an adult human relationship, we hoped to establish a reliance upon the library as a source of authentic and reliable information. A residual of such a program would be the improvement of self concept as well as the development of reading skills related to improving ones own lot in life. We feel that we have been quite successful in achieving these goals and in making an important contribution to campus life.

Evaluation of our program will be examined in the following section.

SECTION D- Evaluation

Through our guided enrichment program, we were able to provide the boys with a wide selection of attractive paperbacks on several interest and reading levels so that no one was ever lacking in materials. Even boys who were deemed poor or slow readers were found to be reading our books. This brought much satisfaction in that these boys might never have picked up a book were it not for the guidance and encouragement from our staff members. Since each librarian was required to read and write reviews for as many books as possible, she could readily suggest a title or fill a special request.

According to our records, an average of 120 books were signed out per month during the evening visits to the cottages. An additional 180 books, on the average, circulated each month from the resource room during the daily sessions. However, we are sure that the figures for the evening sessions are way below what they should be. As is pointed out in our project description, originally we employed the honor system in signing out books, and so we had no record of the number of books read. This system was changed when it was discovered that many of the boys were keeping the books. Others were taking the books for granted and made little effort to return and keep them in good condition. Under this new system, the boys had to sign out books with the librarian. This seemed to bring about a new respect for the materials and made the boys more responsible. In addition, the librarians became more familiar with each boy's reading pattern and were in a better position to help him.

As for attendance figures, our records show an average of six boys per evening session in the cottages; sixteen per day in out summer "lecture" series; fifteen per day in our resource room (open during school hours); and six per night and week-end sessions, held in the resource room and school library. We feel that through our variety of programs and schedules, we were able to reach a sizable number of boys at GJR in one way or another. This has been a major factor in the success we have experienced.

Another evaluative aspect of our program concerns the tremendous acceptance of our program by the staff at GJR. In the past, we have solicited opinions from several of the counselors and have found that they are very impressed with our program and what we have to offer. Several commented that they were "pleased with the boys" interest in the program and the tremendous response to it. Mr. Skip Giordano said that "more boys have come out for this program than for many activities on campus". Mr. Richard Thomas is "in favor of any program, large or small, designed to help the boys in any way." He added, "I have never seen so many of the guys sitting around reading books." Mr. Bob Wise, former director of all cottage personnel, said, "I've heard very favorable comments from the majority of personnel. Some of the cottage uncles are surprised by the participation of certain boys in the program."

Since last November, when we began operating during school hours in the resource room adjacent to the library, the classroom teachers and institutional staff have also shown a great interest in our program. Teachers began sending boys down after they had completed their school work, so that participation in our program became a kind of reward for completing work or doing well. Teachers and staff members began to borrow our books and A-V materials to use in their classrooms or as part of their programs.

This helped them, and it also helped promote our program by making more boys aware of what we had to offer. We felt that we had actually accomplished something, though, when a few of the teachers complained that they had a difficult time getting some of the boys to put their books down once they had started teaching. This was a little annoying to them, but made us happy. We knew that we had some boys actually hooked on reading.

Comments from the boys themselves also proved to us that we were achieving what we set out to do. For instance, one boy said, "The Library Program is a good program. I used to hate to read till I came to GJR. There I met the librarian Karen. She told me the importance and pleasures of reading. Now I read a book a week or every two weeks..." Another commented, "You learn what you want to learn. You see films and listen to records. It is easy to talk to the teacher." One boy replied, "Overall, the whole course is interesting and I would lable it a success. The book program program has been especially advantageous to me. I have always enjoyed reading books and they pass the time, which is important at GJR. . ." Still another added, "Not only does it give us books but we have movies on money handling, jobs, and some other things that would help you when you get out." And finally, one said, "It helps somebody who is interested in some special subject to know and understand more about it. And it is a good idea just for pleasure."

These comments from counselors and boys, as well as personal observations by our staff, seemed to tell us that the students have learned to trust our people, to enjoy reading as a leisure-time activity, and to rely on the library as a source of answers to all kinds of things.

One of the noteworthy observations was the great respect paid to both materials and staff. During the course of our program only two mildly serious behavior problems developed between boys and staff. Not one piece of equipment was damaged due to negligence or mishandling. One cassette tape recorder-player did disappear, but it is our suspicion that an adult was responsible for this act. For the most part, books were handled with great care so that the opportunity to use our services could continue.

To see if our program was having a positive effect on the boys' abilities in the classroom, we noted the numbers of regular participants in our program whose names appeared on the honor roll and school failure list and compared this with those who were non-participants. In the two school years from 1975-77, from a total 325 boys on the honor roll, 231 were regular participants in the library program, 94 were not- a ratio of 2.4 to 1. For the same years, from a total of 102 names on the failure list, 78 were regulars, 24 were not- a ratio on more that 3 to 1. Since there are a number of other factors that could be considered here, we cannot conclusively prove that our program produced these results. However, we do know that an interest in reading was stimulated or enhanced in our regular participants, resulting in an increase in reading ability in most cases. In fact, from a sample of thiry boys chosen from a Jr. High reading class on the basis of their regular participation in the library program, 56.7% of the boys showed an improvement in reading scores, ranging from 2 months to 6.0 years. (Based on pre and post-test results of the Metropolitan Achievement Test.)

This difficulty in accurately controlling outside factors was one of the difficulties we encountered in so many of our efforts at evaluation. It was just impossible to find with absolute certainty that our program did or did not effect certain behaviors. There were just too many other variables to consider. This was complicated by the fact that there was a constant turnover in student population, making any type of objective testing extremely difficult. In addition, we have discovered that it is very hard to measure whether or not these changes are permanent. It is for these reasons that we have relied a good deal on subjective measurements such as observations by the library and institutional staff and comments from counselors and students to monitor our success.

Over the past two years, we have encountered some difficulties, including those mentioned above regarding evaluation. Other problems included a difficulty in scheduling at times, due to conflict with other campus activities; a problem with ineffective personnel; the failure to achieve success with a few of our presentation-discussion topics; and the loss of some of our books. However, we have acknowledged these problems and have made every effort to correct or work around them.

We are pleased with the type of programs we have developed at GJR over the past two years, and will make every effort to see that it continues on a permanent basis.